

## **Potassium Big News about Your Heart!**

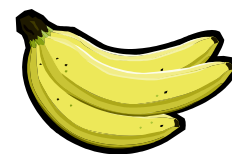


Potassium is a mineral found in many foods. The body needs potassium to keep the heart, muscles and nervous system working properly. Healthy kidneys get rid of extra potassium in the urine. When your kidneys do not work well, potassium can build up in your blood and cause many problems, mainly with your heart.

High potassium can be very harmful but, low potassium is just as dangerous. Potassium is lost when you are on 'water pills', vomit or have diarrhea. A safe blood potassium range for persons with kidney disease is between 3.5 to 5.5 mmol/L. Depending on your current potassium level, you may be able to eat as much as 2-4 grams of potassium in your diet daily.

Potassium is found in different amounts in food. It is very high in:

- Dried fruits, fresh pears, kiwi, nectarines and bananas.
- Citrus fruits such as oranges and grapefruit.
- Vegetables including tomatoes, potatoes, squash and dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach and beet greens.



Potassium is also high in milk, chocolate, coffee, nuts and some salt substitutes. By controlling the amount of potassium you eat, you can keep a safe level in your blood.

Because potassium is found in so many foods, you will need to balance your potassium by making the right food choices. Whether you need to increase or reduce the potassium in your diet, your dietitian can help you determine the amount of potassium you need and work on an eating plan that is right for you.

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## How to Reduce Potassium in Foods

A special process called **leaching** that can be used to remove some of the potassium from certain vegetables. By using this method some higher potassium foods can remain in your diet plan when eaten in small portions.

### Method for white potatoes & sweet potatoes:

- Peel and cut the vegetables in 1/8-inch pieces.
- Place the vegetables in large amount of unsalted, warm water, about 10 times the water to the amount of vegetable. (Example: 1 cup potatoes with 10 cups water)
- Allow to stand for at least 2 hours.
- Drain and rinse vegetables well.
- Place vegetables in about 5 times the amount of unsalted water as the amount of vegetable. (Example: 1 cup potatoes with 5 cups water)
- Cook for 5 minutes, drain off the water and prepare as desired.



### Method for dried beans and dried peas:

- Rinse vegetables well.
- Place the vegetables in large amount of unsalted, warm water, about 10 times the water to the amount of vegetable. (Example: 1 cup dried beans with 10 cups water)
- Allow to stand for at least 2 hours.
- Drain and rinse vegetables well.
- Place vegetables in about 5 times the amount of unsalted water as the amount of vegetable. (Example: 1 cup dried beans with 5 cups water)
- Cook for 5 minutes, drain off the water and prepare as desired.



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## Tips to lower the potassium in your diet:

| Instead of...                   | Try...   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Orange juice or vegetable juice | Tang®, Sunny Delight®, cranberry juice, grape juice, Crystal Light®, Kool-Aid®, Sprite®, lemonade*, 7-up®, tea |
| Bananas, oranges or melons      | Apples, plums, grapes, pineapple or blueberries  |
| Tomatoes                        | Cucumbers, green pepper, broccoli or carrots   |
| Baked potatoes                  | Noodles or rice  |
| Milk                            | Vitamite 100® (a milk substitute)  |
| Ice Cream or pudding            | Sherbet* (count as fluid)  |
| Salt substitutes                | Mrs Dash®, garlic powder, onion powder   |

\*Patients following a diabetic diet should, when possible, substitute a sugar-free food.

### Look for hidden sources of potassium.

The potassium found in foods can change depending on how the food was made.

Most food labels do not include potassium, so keep these tips in mind:

- Dried fruits are high in potassium but, canned fruits and cooked fruits are often lower.
- Other foods that contain high amounts of potassium include salt substitutes, “lite” salts, milk, coffee, powdered drink mixes and some vegetable juices.
- If you aren’t sure about a food, always ask your dietitian!



**Registered Dietitians**  
Department of  
Veterans Affairs  
*Leading the way to better health*

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs  
Nutrition and Food Service